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SUBJECT: MINUSTAH, GOH ASSESS RENEWED GANG VIOLENCE IN
MARTISSANT, THREATS OF DEMONSTRATIONS BY PRO-ARISTIDE
FACTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson, reason 1.5 (D)

¶1. (SBU) Government and MINUSTAH officials are taking stock of the gang shoot-out on July 6-7 which left more than 20 people dead in the "quartier chaud" of Martissant, south of the capital. Government/MINUSTAH meetings are underway to discuss how to manage the fallout from the Martissant incident and to deal with possible demonstrations by Aristide militants demanding their return of their public sector jobs on Monday/Tuesday July 10-11. Police officials have told us that they expect problems at these demonstrations; MINUSTAH officials are more sanguine but claim they are ready if trouble does materialize.

¶2. (SBU) UN SRSG Mulet told Ambassador that MINUSTAH responded as soon as they were informed that gangs were on the rampage in Martissant. He said that fighting erupted Thursday, July 6 between two rival gangs long noted for waging turf battles in the poor suburb southwest of Port au Prince. Shooting continued sporadically off and on during the night, with the two gangs trading gunfire in and around the slum's marketplace and setting fire to houses in the neighborhood. MINUSTAH was finally informed, Mulet said, some time around 0500 July 7, and Sri Lanka troops arrived on the scene by 0600. The HNP arrived about 1300 that same day. Mulet estimated that more than 20 people, including women and children, were killed in the melee. Haitian law requires that they remain in place until a judge observes the corpse in situ and releases it for autopsy. That effort went long into Friday night.

¶3. (SBU) Saying that the reasons for the Martissant violence are at best "murky", Mulet speculates that the shoot out was primarily gang inspired, given the history of the place, although he did not rule out political motivations. According to Mulet, there are those poised to exploit the situation: a Lavalas deputy has already blamed the entire incident on MINUSTAH's failure to bring security to the traditionally violent suburb. That this shoot out coincided with calls for "job" demonstrations on Monday and Tuesday by Aristide militants, Mulet says is worrisome but manageable if the government acts quickly. However, during a meeting with Prime Minister Alexis later that day, Alexis deflected Mulet's recommendation that he make an immediate public statement on the event, suggesting that a press conference later in the week might be more useful.

¶4. (C) Mulet and Deputy SRSG Rossin met with President Preval Saturday morning to discuss the situation and to urge that he go public with a call for calm. Preval demurred, contending that the matter was the responsibility of the government. He would let Alexis take the lead, he said. It was unclear, according to Rossin, whether Preval was aware of

possible demonstrations on Monday. In any event, the UN officials said, he clearly did not want to get involved in the issue, at least with them.

15. (SBU) Rossin told Ambassador Sunday that a follow-up meeting with DG HNP Andresol, Minister of Interior and Minister of Justice on Saturday evening was more encouraging.

Although MinInterior Bien Aime seemed preoccupied with rumint, the other participants were more focused. UN officials again pushed for the GOH to go public with a commitment to investigate the events of Martissant and ensure that credible medical and legal professionals were involved in autopsies and any investigation. The group seemed to agree. According to Rossin, the HNP and other elements of the Haitian government will continue to meet with MINUSTAH officials throughout Sunday to prepare for possible demos on Monday.

16. (SBU) Dealing with the current situation has been made more difficult by Haiti's notorious gossip network. Rumors (and emails) are beginning to circulate around Port au Prince, alleging that the gangs' so-called "truce" is over and that proposed demonstrations this week will be intentionally violent. Some of the well-heeled denizens of Petionville are busily passing these emails along to associates both here and abroad and rumors are finding their way into press reporting and expatriate conversation. One email we have seen calls on residents to protect their families, stay away from town on Monday and Tuesday. and trust only in God. The Group of 184 has seized the opportunity to hold a meeting on Monday to call for communal action against insecurity and the rise in kidnapping. Both GOH and MINUSTAH officials see this as an effort to embarrass Preval and MINUSTAH.

17. (C) The HNP and MINUSTAH have developed a plan which will have increased security patrols and checkpoints out on the streets and new checkpoints around town beginning early Monday morning to ward off possible violence. The two will also operate a joint command center during the period to ensure close coordination. Alexis will speak to the press Monday morning. Preval did send personal envoys to Martissant yesterday and reached out to to organisations populaires Sunday afternoon in a bid to quiet tensions; Cabinet colleagues are hopeful that his appeal had some effect. As of 8 am, Monday morning, Port au Prince is quiet.

18. (C) Comment. The GOH has been lamentably slow off the mark on the Martissant issue and responding to the possibility of violent demonstrations. That has allowed critics of the regime and those with their own political agendas to shape the debate. Many Haitians will see this as the first test of the Preval government. Thus far, it has been found wanting.

SANDERSON